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Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Protection of children affected by armed conflict

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly, in accordance with Assembly resolution 51/77 of 12 December 1996, the report prepared by Mr. Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

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Annex

Protection of children affected by armed conflict

Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to section II of General Assembly resolution 51/77 of 12 December 1996, by which the Assembly, *inter alia*, requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to submit to it an annual report on the situation of children affected by armed conflict.

2. Since the World Summit for Children, in 1990, the United Nations has increasingly sought to draw international attention to the horrendous plight of children affected by armed conflict. In 1993, following a recommendation by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the General Assembly adopted resolution 48/157 of 20 December 1993, recommending that the Secretary-General appoint an independent expert to study the impact of armed conflict on children. Ms. Graça Machel, former Minister of Education of Mozambique, was appointed the expert of the Secretary-General, charged with the task of undertaking the study with the special support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights. In 1996, following two years of extensive research, consultations and field visits, Ms. Machel submitted her report, entitled "Impact of armed conflict on children" (A/51/306 and Add.1), to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

3. In response to the Machel report, the General Assembly adopted resolution 51/77, in which it recommended that the Secretary-General appoint for a period of three years a Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children. The Assembly also called upon States and institutions concerned to provide voluntary contributions in support of the work of the Special Representative.

4. The Secretary-General appointed Mr. Olara A. Otunnu as his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in September 1997. In announcing the appointment, the Secretary-General underscored the urgent need for a public advocate and moral voice on behalf of children whose rights and welfare have been and are being violated in the context of armed conflict.

5. The Special Representative should like to pay a special tribute to Ms. Graça Machel for her ground-breaking work and singular contribution to promoting the rights and protection of children victimized by armed conflict. Her report provided the first comprehensive and most compelling assessment of the multiple ways in which children are abused and brutalized in the context of armed conflict. The Special Representative feels particularly honoured to follow in Ms. Machel's footsteps and to build on the strong foundation she has built.

II. Children affected by armed conflict: the context

6. As the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations emphasizes, our first duty is "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". In this we have failed profoundly. Not only are millions of children still the victims of war, far too often they are its principal targets and even its instruments. At this moment, in approximately 50 countries around the world, children are suffering from the effects of conflict and its aftermath.

7. For all the children deliberately massacred or caught in crossfire or maimed by anti-personnel landmines, many more have been deprived of their physical, mental and emotional needs in societies at war. Millions have lost their homes and their parents, not to mention years of education and their youth. Some have been permanently traumatized by the events they have witnessed and experienced. In today's internecine conflicts, children are specifically targeted in strategies to eliminate the next generation of potential adversaries. To the same end, children, and especially girls, have been made the targets of sexual abuse and gender-based violence on a large scale. Most cynically, children have been compelled to become instruments of war, recruited or kidnapped to become child soldiers, thus forced to give violent expression to the hatreds of adults. In all, an estimated 2 million children have been killed in situations of armed conflict since 1987, while three times that number have been seriously injured or permanently disabled.

8. This brutal reality has been exacerbated by a qualitative change in the nature and scope of conflict in recent times. Today's conflicts are primarily internal, often fought by multiple, semi-autonomous armed groups within existing State boundaries. The international rules of warfare, governing Inter-State wars fought by regular armies, are routinely ignored in these situations of "total war". Often protracted, such conflicts expose successive generations of children to horrendous violence.

9. Against a backdrop of increasingly accessible and destructive conventional weapons, many of these conflicts pit compatriot against compatriot, neighbour against neighbour. They are often characterized by the demonization of the "enemy community" and the orchestration of vicious hate campaigns. In today's internecine warfare, the village

has become the battlefield and civilian populations the primary target. In the First World War, civilians accounted for some 5 per cent of casualties. In the Second World War, that figure rose to 48 per cent. Today, up to 90 per cent of conflict casualties around the world are civilians, a large and increasing number of these are children and women. This is the world upside down.

10. At the heart of this growing phenomenon of mass violence and social disintegration is a crisis of values. Perhaps the most fundamental loss a society can suffer is the collapse of its own value system. Many societies exposed to protracted conflicts have seen their community values radically undermined if not shattered altogether. This has given rise to an "ethical vacuum", a setting in which international standards are ignored with impunity and where local value systems have lost their sway.

11. Children represent the future of human civilization and the future of every society. To permit them to be used as pawns in warfare, whether as targets or perpetrators, is to cast a shadow on the future. From generation to generation, violence begets violence, as the abused grow up to become abusers. Children who are thus violated carry the scars of fear and hatred in their hearts and minds. Forced to learn to kill instead of pursuing education, the children of conflict lack the knowledge and skills needed to build their own futures and the futures of their communities. For society, the lives destroyed and the opportunities lost can have devastating effects on its long-term stability and development.

12. The international community has an obligation to be concerned about the protection of all non-combatants caught in the midst of violent conflicts. Yet there is an urgent need to focus special attention on the plight of children. They are the ones least responsible for conflict, yet most vulnerable to its excesses. Children, as the most innocent and powerless victims of armed conflict, require special protection. In zones of conflict, international advocacy and intercession are essential to ensure that parties to conflict commit themselves to the protection of children from exploitation, abuse and brutalization. The international community must ensure that those who target children do not continue to do so with impunity.

III. Main objectives: promoting prevention, protection and rehabilitation

13. A serious and systematic effort by all concerned parties – from Governments to the United Nations system to civil society organizations to private citizens – is needed to address the abominations being committed against children in the context of armed conflict. As an advocate on behalf of these children, the Special Representative is working to spearhead that effort. He is seeking to combine normative, political and humanitarian strategies in efforts to promote prevention, protection and rehabilitation for the benefit of children. In this context, the Special Representative is developing the following major activities.

A. Protection through public advocacy

14. The Special Representative is to give a public voice to children who have been victimized by the chaos, cruelty and lawlessness that characterize contemporary armed conflicts. He is working to raise greater public and official awareness of international instruments and local norms that provide for the rights, protection and welfare of children, even as he highlights the horrific impact of ongoing conflicts on them. His role is to be a public advocate and a voice for prevention, protection and rehabilitation. The Special Representative seeks to draw official and public attention to the abominations being committed against children, and to mobilize action through a range of activities, including field visits, the engagement of concerned Governments and civil organizations, media outreach, addressing opinion leaders, and other awareness-raising strategies.

B. Promoting concrete initiatives in the midst of ongoing conflicts

15. In situations of active violence where the security and well-being of children are seriously endangered, the Special Representative undertakes political and humanitarian diplomacy, proposing concrete initiatives to prevent or mitigate the suffering of children. He, in effect, serves as a facilitator and a resource for the agencies and bodies that operate on the ground. He works with them, for example, to unblock difficult political situations and to seek access to civilian populations in distress, the worst affected of whom are always children and women. This sensitive political role requires close coordination with partners within and outside

the United Nations community, especially the relief and humanitarian organizations whose work on the ground would be facilitated by such initiatives.

C. Mobilizing concerted response to post-conflict needs

16. In countries that are emerging from conflict, the Special Representative is highlighting the needs of children and women whose lives have been shattered by war. Cessation of hostilities does not mean that war is over, particularly for children who have been extensively exposed to the culture of violence. Only with a systematic programme of healing and reintegration into society can the cycle of violence be broken. The healing and rehabilitation needs of children should, therefore, constitute a central theme and not an afterthought of post-conflict peace-building programmes. The Special Representative is working to promote this concern with agencies and bodies of the United Nations system, as well as non-governmental organizations. Some of the issues and needs that should be addressed in a collaborative manner include: prioritization of child rights within the terms of peace accords and in the mandates of peacekeeping operations, the demobilization of child soldiers and their social reintegration, the return and reintegration of displaced and refugee children, mine-clearance and mine-awareness programmes, psychological recovery, educational and vocational training, and issues of juvenile justice. Promotion of compliance with international standards and re-establishment of local norms that promote child protection and welfare also merit priority attention.

IV. Working on selected themes

17. The Machel report highlighted a wide range of important issues affecting the rights and welfare of children in the context of armed conflict. Given the breadth of this agenda and practical constraints, there is a need to select some areas for concentration of efforts. The following are the key issues for which a strong advocacy role by the Special Representative will have particular added value and to which he is giving priority attention at this stage. In each of these areas, there are a number of organizations with considerable experience in the development and implementation of programme activities in conflict or post-conflict situations. The Special Representative will use his mandate to complement their efforts and highlight common concerns. Their experience and initiatives will be invaluable to his own work of advocacy and mobilization of support for children, especially in promoting increased attention in political circles to the cause of children.

A. Participation of children in armed conflict

18. Children simply have no role in warfare. The Special Representative is seizing every available opportunity and forum to underscore this fundamental principle.

19. An alarming trend in recent years is the increasing participation, direct and indirect, of children in armed conflict. It is estimated that up to 300,000 children under the age of 18 are serving as combatants in government armed forces or armed opposition groups in ongoing conflicts. Indeed, the development and proliferation of lightweight automatic weapons has made it possible for very young children to bear and use arms. Many more are being used in indirect ways that are more difficult to measure, such as cooks, messengers and porters. Children have also been used for mine clearance, spying and suicide bombing.

20. The Special Representative is working to mobilize public opinion and political pressure against this terrible trend. In particular, he is advocating stronger and more concerted action against the military recruitment of children under the agreed age limit. In this connection, the Special Representative strongly advocated the designation of the recruitment of children under 15 and their participation in hostilities as a war crime in the deliberations for the establishing of a permanent International Criminal Court; he welcomes its inclusion in the Statute of the Court.

21. The Special Representative strongly supports current efforts to raise the legal age for recruitment and participation in hostilities to 18 years, through the adoption of an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this connection, he recently held a meeting with the new Chairperson of the Working Group on the Optional Protocol; together they have agreed to pursue a common course of collaboration and advocacy on this issue.

22. The Special Representative is also drawing attention to the various political and socio-economic conditions that often facilitate the recruitment and participation of children in armed conflict. He is also urging more effective response to the needs of child combatants in post-conflict situations.

B. Taking norms and values seriously

23. The abominations that are currently being visited upon children in so many theatres of conflict around the world are

due in large measure to a normative crisis at both the international and local levels. The traditional limits on the conduct of warfare – international instruments as well as local injunctions and taboos – are being cast aside. Clearly, the development and codification of these global and local norms is only the first step. To be meaningful, they must be respected and applied. The immense effort involved in the creation of international instruments and standards comes to naught if adoption is not followed by application. Similarly, the rich well of history and traditions from which local values spring means little if those norms are discarded when most needed. In his work, the Special Representative stresses the need to turn principle into practice, reminding all parties concerned, including non-State actors, that international and local standards of conduct should be resurrected and respected, in order to prevent the abuse and brutalization of children.

24. *International norms*. Over the past 50 years, the countries of the world have developed and ratified an impressive series of international human rights and humanitarian instruments. Several of these address the rights, protection and welfare of children. The most pertinent are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Geneva Conventions (1949), along with their Additional Protocols. The latter contain some 25 articles specifically pertaining to children. Protocol I stipulates that children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of assault during conflict. Article 3, common to all four Conventions, is the cornerstone for the protection of civilians in internal conflicts and is binding on all parties to a conflict, regardless of their relationship to the State. Its fundamental guarantees are supplemented by Protocol II. Article 4.3 of Protocol II is devoted exclusively to children, enjoining that they "be provided with the care and aid they require".

25. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most universally ratified international instrument, calls for the protection of children's right to life, education, health and other fundamental needs. These provisions apply equally in times of armed conflict and in times of peace. However, the value of these provisions is limited to the extent to which they are applied. Words on paper cannot save children in peril.

26. The Special Representative has followed with great interest the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in particular when it considers reports on countries in which children are affected by armed conflict. The Committee deserves particular recognition for its monitoring role in relation to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. He calls on States party to the Convention to cooperate fully with the Committee, and supports efforts to increase its membership, with a view to strengthening the capacity of the Committee to better respond to an increasing workload.

27. *Local value systems*. In addition to international instruments, all societies can draw on their own local value systems, including a normative order governing civic relations and the conduct of war. Societies throughout history have recognized the special obligation to protect children from harm.

28. Increasingly, however, especially during periods of protracted conflict, we are witnessing a breakdown of traditional norms and social codes of behaviour, with horrendous consequences for the civilian population. In the resulting "ethical vacuum" anything goes. Distinctions between civilians and combatants have broken down. Children, women and the elderly have all become fair game in the single-minded struggle for power.

29. In such situations, the Special Representative encourages the revival of critically important local value systems, values that promote the rights, protection and welfare of children. In particular, the role of institutions and community structures that normally provide a sense of ethical rootedness, such as parents, extended families, elders, teachers, schools and religious institutions, should be supported and strengthened.

30. *The International Criminal Court*. The concern of the Special Representative during the deliberations for the establishment of a permanent International Criminal Court was to ensure that "the best interest" of, and "maximum protection" for children affected by armed conflict should serve as guiding principles in the drafting of the statute for a permanent International Criminal Court. He consulted extensively with various delegations and relevant non-governmental organizations in preparation for the Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries, which was held in Rome in the summer of 1998. In particular, he called for the following:

(a) Recruitment into armed forces or groups of children below the legal minimum age for recruitment should be defined as a war crime;

(b) Targeting of buildings or sites that usually have a significant presence of children, such as schools and hospitals, should be defined as a war crime;

(c) Rape and other forms of sexual violence in the context of armed conflict should be defined as a war crime, with provision for the severest punishment.

The Special Representative is encouraged that the Statute of the International Criminal Court has given expression to most of the issues of concern to his mandate.

31. The establishment of the International Criminal Court is of considerable significance for the cause of children. It is a powerful tool that considerably reinforces advocacy for children targeted in the midst of conflict, in criminalizing specific acts of violence against children that have been, until now, purely within the category of obligations of States parties to international human rights treaties and international humanitarian law.

C. Rape and sexual abuse in the context of armed conflict

32. The Special Representative called for the criminalization under the Statute of the International Criminal Court of rape and other forms of sexual violence in the context of armed conflict. The breakdown of the social fabric and the disintegration of families at times of armed conflict often leaves women and girls especially vulnerable to sexual violence. He is particularly encouraged that rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization or any other form of violence of comparable gravity have been defined as crimes against humanity in the Statute. This achievement is sending a strong warning to combatants that rape and sexual abuse can no longer be perpetrated with impunity in times of armed conflict, and that combatants are now liable for prosecution for their individual actions.

33. Children affected by gender-based violence also include those who have witnessed the rape of a family member. The Special Representative is seeking to raise greater awareness of this issue, and to promote the need for the provision of special health and psychological care for victims within post-conflict rehabilitation programmes. Given the current paucity of analysis and research on sexual abuse and gender-based violence in the context of armed conflict, the Special Representative is actively promoting more systematic research on this problem.

D. Mine awareness and rehabilitation of child victims

34. Civilians, including children, are exposed to the danger of approximately 100 million landmines left buried in more than 68 countries. It is estimated that anti-personnel landmines kill or maim about 26,000 persons a year, and approximately 800 children are killed or maimed by landmines every month. Millions of various unexploded ordnance also represent additional hazards.

35. In December 1997, 122 countries signed, in Ottawa, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Landmines and on their Destruction, which was a milestone achievement for the international community. The rapid ratification of the treaty by over 40 countries is a notable accomplishment that will assure that the treaty will enter into force early in 1999 and that attention can now be given to its effective implementation. In the immediate term, the Special Representative is emphasizing the child dimension, especially the need for more rapid progress in mine clearance, greater support for mine-awareness programmes for children and rehabilitation programmes to help child victims. He is working with key partners to address these concerns, especially in post-conflict situations.

E. Displaced children

36. In all of his country visits, from Sierra Leone to Yugoslavia, the Special Representative has been moved by the particularly precarious conditions of displaced populations. This is a matter of deep concern for the Special Representative. Children constitute well over 50 per cent of the 24 million people who are either refugees beyond their national borders or internally displaced persons within their own countries. He has called upon Governments and other authorities to meet their obligations regarding the protection of refugee and internally displaced children. In September 1998, he addressed the thirteenth session of the UNHCR Standing Committee during its review of UNHCR follow-up activities to the Machel report. The Special Representative supports the enhanced focus of UNHCR on refugee children. UNHCR and the Special Representative have agreed to work closely to promote the protection of refugee and internally displaced children.

37. The Special Representative has been in contact with Mr. Francis Deng, Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons; they will be working in close collaboration on the protection of the large number of children displaced within their own countries.

F. Impact of small arms on children

38. There is a strong link between the accessibility of small arms and the victimization of children. The

proliferation of these weapons has made it possible for very young children to be perpetrators of violence. The Special Representative, together with the Department for Disarmament Affairs, organizations of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations, supports instituting controls for the transfer of arms to conflict zones, especially where children and women are being abused and brutalized. He places importance on demobilizing child soldiers and reintegrating them into society. The Special Representative also supports the recommendations of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms to develop guidelines for disarming combatants with respect to small arms, light weapons and ammunition, as well as their suggestions for collection and disposal of those weapons. He intends to place priority on advocacy for, and support of, assessments of the impact of the availability of small arms on child morbidity and mortality, following the pioneering work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in several countries in assessing the impact of such weapons on civilian casualties.

G. Impact of sanctions on children

39. In the light of concerns expressed in the Machel report and other recent reports about the ill-effects of sanctions regimes on children, the Special Representative seeks to work closely with the Security Council, Governments, non-governmental organizations and relevant United Nations agencies and bodies to explore preventive measures, such as child-focused humanitarian exemptions, child impact assessments and more targeted sanctions regimes. In addition, he is exploring more effective ways to ensure their recovery from the adverse effects of sanctions. He endorses the inter-agency analysis, led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, of the humanitarian impact of sanctions.

H. Incorporating standards into United Nations operations

40. The United Nations and its agencies, particularly those with operational activities in the field, are important channels for building greater awareness and encouraging more consistent application of human rights and humanitarian norms to protect children affected by armed conflict. In order to achieve this, United Nations agencies and bodies should be encouraged to more systematically integrate these standards into their policies, procedures and operations, providing guidelines and training to their personnel whenever necessary, as well as setting the best example through their own conduct. This pertains to all United Nations personnel, civilian and military. The Special Representative applauds existing efforts in this regard and encourages all United Nations bodies to further build into their internal cultures and operational activities greater awareness of and sensitivity to the rights, protection and welfare of children in the context of armed conflict.

V. Field missions and country initiatives for children

41. From Sierra Leone to Tajikistan, from Liberia to Cambodia, from the Sudan to Kosovo, from Sri Lanka to Afghanistan, millions of children are being robbed of their childhood and left with mangled lives.

42. The Special Representative has made special efforts to seek improvements in the situation of children in countries affected by conflict. The list of such countries is large, numbering approximately 50, comprising those in the midst of conflict as well as in post-conflict recovery. During his term, the Special Representative seeks to visit a number of affected countries in order to assess first-hand the situation of children, obtain commitments for child protection from parties to conflict and heighten public awareness of their desperate plight. He intends to lend his support to the negotiation of humanitarian space for children and other civilian victims of armed conflict, so as to facilitate coordinated actions by local and international actors to improve the protection and welfare of children.

43. Since his appointment, the Special Representative has personally visited the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Kosovo), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and the Sudan. His office has also conducted two assessment missions to Afghanistan. In his field visits to countries affected by conflict, the Special Representative has relied upon the invaluable partnership and support of several United Nations agencies, especially UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) and a number of non-governmental organizations.

44. During these visits, the Special Representative has met with government officials as well as representatives of United Nations agencies, international and local non-governmental organizations and representatives of civil society. In his discussions with Governments and all parties to conflict, the Special Representative stresses the humanitarian character of his missions. He emphasized his

concern for all dimensions of the impact of conflict on children, and underscored his preoccupation with the fate of all victimized children, regardless of their ethnic, religious or political affiliations, or the source of their victimization. In several cases, the discussions resulted in a number of important commitments concerning, for example, assurance of access to humanitarian aid for affected populations, cessation of the recruitment and participation of children in hostilities, use of landmines and targeting of civilian populations. Country-specific commitments are specified below.

A. Afghanistan

45. The Special Representative has been exploring ways to promote the protection and welfare of children affected by the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

46. During two assessment visits by the office of the Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, in January and March 1998, the following main problems affecting children were identified: severe poverty, which is manifested in multiple ways such as street children and children being recruited for military purposes; lack of access to education and health services; discriminatory practices against girls; physical disabilities owing to mine casualties and non-existent or poor health-care facilities; and psychological trauma. In the complex humanitarian emergency situation that prevails in Afghanistan, children and women suffer doubly: from the devastations of the ongoing war, compounded by difficulties of the humanitarian assistance community in providing protection and relief to those affected by it, owing to continuing insecurity, official discrimination against girls and women and inadequate resources.

47. The office of the Special Representative has identified the following types of initiatives to guide future efforts:

(a) Improving children's access to humanitarian assistance, including non-life-saving assistance such as education;

(b) Encouraging donors and implementing partners to prioritize assistance programmes and provide a coordinated response, in the context of the strategic framework for Afghanistan that is being developed by the United Nations; key areas of assistance include emergency food and health care, education, mine clearance and awareness, drug control, creation of employment opportunities and support for displaced persons and their voluntary repatriation;

(c) Highlighting the plight of children affected by war in Afghanistan as part of an effort to mobilize domestic and international pressure on Afghan parties and involved Governments to, at the minimum, desist from violating children and, ideally, to undertake meaningful efforts at finding a peaceful solution to the conflict;

(d) Advocacy with Afghan political groups and Governments of neighbouring countries to ensure that children are not recruited for military purposes.

48. In support of these efforts, the office of the Special Representative has initiated contacts with key actors in the international assistance community in Afghanistan, including representatives of donor countries, United Nations agencies, ICRC and non-governmental organizations. Contacts have also been established with various local non-governmental organizations in Pakistan. These groups can provide ongoing monitoring of and insights into the situation of children in Afghanistan, as part of an effort to focus public attention on the importance of protection and welfare of children.

B. Liberia

49. The Special Representative visited Liberia from 11 to 13 March 1998 to assess the situation of children after a period of protracted civil war in the country. During his visit, the Special Representative met with several senior officials, including the Ministers for Health, Education and Justice, the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health and Social Welfare, the Chief Justice, heads of United Nations agencies and representatives of local and international non-governmental organizations.

50. The protracted period of conflict has had a devastating effect on the children of Liberia, many of whom have known no other way of life. A serious erosion of local value systems has also taken place. The Special Representative was, however, encouraged by the climate of United Nations inter-agency cooperation on issues of child rights, particularly in the sectors of education and health, where UNDP provides the physical infrastructure, UNICEF the materials, WFP the food and entities such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) the medical assistance. The activities of non-governmental organizations in areas such as family reunification, demobilization, vocational training for war-affected youth, health and education, and the presence of an active and well-organized civil society in Liberia, are further promising signs.

51. The categories of children identified as having special protection needs include ex-combatant youth, refugee and internally displaced children, sexually abused girls and unaccompanied and street children. The following were identified as the key challenges requiring initiatives:

(a) Empowering families, economically and socially, to resume their roles in bringing up and supporting children, thus moving away from a policy of heavy dependence on institutional care. At present, many unaccompanied, displaced and orphaned children are resident either on the streets or in orphanages, many of which are of dubious quality;

(b) Carefully assessing and accrediting existing institutions such as orphanages;

(c) Improving educational opportunities through reduced school fees, better infrastructure and reading materials and improving salaries for teachers. Currently, teachers in rural areas in particular are usually unpaid, or paid only in food;

(d) Revitalizing primary health care, particularly through the revival of rural clinics. In this regard, too, local civil society and non-governmental organizations should be strengthened to enable them to become effective implementing partners. A major child health issue is the need to promote adolescent reproductive health awareness and practice;

(e) It is vital to dedicate a larger proportion of the national budget to the revitalization of social services, in particular health and education. Currently, the Government spends approximately 60 per cent of the budget on security, while 7 per cent is spent on health and 4 per cent on education;

(f) Improving the juvenile justice system, particularly by complementing the newly created juvenile court with facilities for the separate pre-trial detention and post-trial incarceration (if necessary) of minors, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. ICRC is currently involved in assisting the Ministry of Justice on this matter;

(g) Training for income-generating activities for all children affected by war, without differentiating between former combatants and those who were involved in conflict in other ways;

(h) Reviving local values and support systems, such as the role of the traditional *Sande* and *Poro* "bush" schools, which is a traditional system in rural communities to inculcate local ethics in children;

(i) Supporting local advocacy efforts, by encouraging the formation of a group of local eminent persons willing to act as advocates for children in Liberia and by instituting a radio station to promote issues related to the interests and rights of children.

C. Sierra Leone

52. The Special Representative visited Sierra Leone on 10 and 11 March 1998, at the invitation of the Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), on the occasion of the restoration to office of the President of Sierra Leone, Mr. Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. The Special Representative was received by the President of Sierra Leone, and met with several other leaders from ECOWAS countries and the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) during the visit.

53. The Special Representative undertook a second, more extended, visit to Sierra Leone on 26 to 29 May 1998. He was received by the President, met with the Commander of ECOMOG, the National Coordinator of the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) (known as Kamajors), the Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Information and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. He also held discussions with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, the heads of various United Nations entities, especially UNDP and UNICEF, the Child Protection Committee, the Inter-Religious Council, parliamentarians and international and local non-governmental organizations.

54. The Special Representative travelled to the eastern region of Sierra Leone, visiting the towns of Daru, Segbwema and Kenema, close to the areas where active fighting is still going on with the remnants of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). He also met with the regional commanders of ECOMOG and the regional leaders of CDF (Kamajors). He had the opportunity to witness for himself the terrible plight of internally displaced people, including hundreds of unaccompanied children who had recently emerged from the bush.

55. Throughout his visit and in all his discussions, it became clear that one of the most pressing challenges facing Sierra Leone at the present time was the "crisis of the young" – the plight of children affected directly and indirectly by the conflict. There are many serious manifestations of the impact of the prolonged conflict on children, such as street children, child combatants, displaced

children, unaccompanied children, and victims of atrocities, as well as the collapse of health and education services. It was also striking that so many people expressed their alarm at the rapid erosion of local value systems within the society, especially among the youth.

56. The Special Representative identified five areas requiring urgent action by the international community: (a) demobilization and reintegration of child combatants; (b) resettlement of internally displaced persons; (c) tracing of families of unaccompanied children; (d) rehabilitation and support of victims without limbs; and (e) provision and rehabilitation of medical and educational services. He appealed for urgent international assistance specifically targeted to the victims of the recent atrocities, especially those who have lost their limbs. Approximately 300 victims of reprisals by AFRC and RUF fighters had been treated during a period of one month (May 1998) at Connaught Hospital in Freetown; this is estimated to constitute only a small proportion of those who have been maimed by the atrocities. The number of victims reporting to up-country hospitals is still unknown, and a larger number of people are reported to have died or are still suffering in the bush.

57. The Special Representative also appealed for an immediate response to the needs of children in the eastern region, many of whom are unaccompanied and whose parents have either been killed, captured or have fled. Most reports indicated that more children were still hiding in the bush. Immediate relief supplies of food, medicine and clothing were needed to meet the basic needs of those children.

58. In discussions with government leaders, the leadership of ECOMOG and the leadership of CDF (Kamajors), the Special Representative raised several specific issues. These discussions resulted in a number of important commitments, including the following:

(a) *Recruitment and demobilization of children.* CDF (Kamajors) agreed to stop the recruitment and initiation of children under the age of 18, and to begin the process of demobilization of child combatants currently within their ranks;

(b) *Treatment of AFRC and RUF child combatants.* Both ECOMOG and CDF (Kamajors) agreed to provide special protection to AFRC and RUF child combatants who came into their custody through surrender, capture or escape. There have been recent incidents of on-the-spot reprisals against such children;

(c) *Joint task force for demobilization of child combatants.* It was agreed that a joint task force should be constituted, comprising senior representatives from ECOMOG, CDF (Kamajors), the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and international humanitarian agencies, in order to establish and oversee a systematic procedure for demobilization and reintegration of child combatants;

(d) *Recruitment and training of a new national army.* The Government announced plans for the establishment of a new national army. The recruitment and training of the new army were entrusted to ECOMOG. In this context, the Government agreed to set an example by not recruiting children under the age of 18. The Government and ECOMOG also agreed to receive assistance from United Nations agencies in providing training materials on humanitarian and human rights standards concerning the protection of civilians, particularly women and children;

(e) *Establishment of a coordination group.* In order to realize a more coordinated and effective national response to the needs of children affected by conflict, President Kabbah directed that a group be established, consisting of relevant government ministries, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, to propose and coordinate actions in this area. Discussions were under way on the establishment of the group;

(f) *Parliamentarian caucus for children.* Following their discussion with the Special Representative, an all-party group of parliamentarians constituted a caucus to serve as parliamentary advocates for the rights, protection and welfare of children affected by conflict in Sierra Leone.

59. At the conclusion of his visit, the Special Representative urged the international community to make the rehabilitation of the children of Sierra Leone a pilot project for post-conflict reconstruction. He noted that while the challenge of children in Sierra Leone was serious, it was not overwhelming. The situation could be turned around with carefully organized and targeted assistance. Providing new hope for the children of Sierra Leone may well be the best way to ensure national recovery for the country as a whole. In this regard, he challenged the international community to respond in a more vigorous and concerted fashion to the needs of children affected by the conflict, and warned that the restored democracy as well as prospects for stability could be seriously jeopardized if the international community adopted a wait-and-see attitude on Sierra Leone. He also commended the positive role and example of ECOMOG in Sierra Leone, and called on the international community to provide greater financial and logistical support for ECOMOG to facilitate its tasks in Sierra Leone.

60. The Special Representative conveyed the call for making the situation of children in Sierra Leone a pilot case, and the need to provide assistance to ECOMOG was conveyed to Governments, partners within the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. He has been encouraged by the support those proposals have received, notably within the European Union, at the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and at the special conference on Sierra Leone held in New York on 30 June 1998.

D. Sri Lanka

61. The Special Representative visited Sri Lanka from 3 to 9 May 1998 to witness and assess the multiple ways in which children are affected by the ongoing armed conflict in that country. He was received by the President, Ms. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, the Minister for Justice, Constitutional Affairs, National Integration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr. G. L. Peiris, parliamentarians and other government officials. He travelled to affected areas in the Jaffna peninsula and the Vanni region, where he visited schools, resettlement villages and centres for internally displaced persons. While in those areas, he also met with local government officials, military commanders and religious and civic leaders, as well as with representatives of local and international humanitarian agencies. He had the opportunity to meet with two senior representatives appointed by the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), V. Prabhakaran, Mr. Thamilselvan, Head of the Political Section, and Mr. Balasingham, Political Adviser.

62. In his discussions with the Government and the LTTE leadership, the Special Representative raised several issues pertaining to the rights, protection and welfare of children, and obtained the following specific commitments from the parties.

63. *Provision and distribution of humanitarian supplies.* Efforts were being made to respond to the humanitarian situation in affected areas, but more needed to be done to meet the critical and growing needs of the affected populations. The Government agreed to review the list of restricted items and to examine procedures to expedite the approval and distribution of necessary supplies. The LTTE leadership made a commitment not to interfere with the flow of humanitarian supplies destined for affected populations and accepted the need for a framework to monitor this commitment.

64. *Free movement of displaced populations.* The Government agreed to expedite procedures for the issue of permits for movement in affected areas. The LTTE leadership made the commitment that the movement of displaced populations who wanted to return to areas now under government control would not be impeded. They also pledged not to impede the return to their homes of Muslim populations displaced by previous outbreaks of hostilities and they accepted that a framework to monitor those processes should be put in place.

65. *Recruitment and participation of children in hostilities.* The LTTE leadership undertook not to use children below 18 years of age in combat and not to recruit children less than 17 years old. They also accepted a proposal to create a framework to monitor those commitments. The Government of Sri Lanka reiterated its commitment to the policy of not recruiting children under the age of 18 years. The Special Representative welcomed government assurances that there were no plans to embark on a recruitment drive in schools.

66. *Observing the Convention on the Rights of the Child.* The Government of Sri Lanka has signed and ratified the Convention. It has also prepared a National Children's Charter. The Special Representative stressed the importance for all parties, including non-state actors, to respect the principles and provisions of the Convention. In this connection, he urged the LTTE leadership to make a public commitment to respect the Convention. He was encouraged by the LTTE readiness to have its cadres receive information and instruction on the Convention.

67. *Targeting of civilian populations and sites.* The Special Representative expressed the gravest concern about the targeting of civilian populations and sites throughout the country. The LTTE leadership acknowledged this to be an important and legitimate concern and undertook to review its strategies and tactics in this regard.

68. Another important issue that the Special Representative raised with the Government and with the LTTE leadership was the continuing use of landmines by both sides. He very much regretted that it had not been possible on this occasion to obtain a commitment from either party to refrain from using landmines; he indicated his intention to pursue this issue.

69. During his travel to the conflict-affected areas, the Special Representative witnessed the trauma and distress on the part of affected populations there. He saw how the protracted conflict has undermined the social and ethical fabric of society, and was struck by the deep and widespread yearning for peace on the part of all communities. At a final

address in Colombo, he strongly endorsed the launching of a UNICEF-sponsored local initiative, proclaiming "children as zones of peace", as a systematic effort to apply global recommendations on the protection, rights and welfare of children to the specific context of Sri Lanka.

70. The Special Representative welcomed the commitments made by the Government of Sri Lanka and the leadership of LTTE, which represented a significant development towards ensuring the protection, rights and welfare of children affected by the ongoing armed conflict in Sri Lanka. He called upon the Government and LTTE to take concrete steps to fulfil their respective commitments, and launched a strong appeal to the international community to provide more assistance to conflict-affected populations in Sri Lanka, especially for resettlement and the meeting of their urgent health and education needs.

E. Sudan

71. The Special Representative visited the Sudan from 14 to 17 June 1998 with two objectives: (a) to assess first-hand the impact on children of the protracted conflict in the Sudan, and (b) to seek the support of the Government of the Sudan in locating and facilitating the release of children abducted from northern Uganda.

72. During his visit, he met with government leaders, including First Vice-President Ali Osman Mohamed Taha; the Speaker of the National Assembly, Hassan Abdalla Al Turabi; the Minister of External Relations, Mustafa Osman Ismail; the Chairman of the Southern States Coordinating Council, Riak Machar; heads of United Nations agencies and international and local non-governmental organizations; and representatives of civil society. He also travelled to the southern city of Juba, where he visited camps for internally displaced populations.

73. Regarding his second objective, the Special Representative expressed his appreciation to the Government of the Sudan for facilitating the release, during his visit, of three Ugandan children who had been abducted from northern Uganda by Ugandan rebel groups. The three children were transported from the southern city of Juba to Khartoum, where they were placed in the care of UNICEF and UNHCR, before being repatriated to Uganda.

74. The Sudanese Government made a pledge to assist with the ongoing efforts of the Special Representative to obtain the release of other children who have also been abducted from northern Uganda. In this regard, the Special Representative especially requested the Sudanese Government to use its influence to help trace and secure the release of schoolgirls abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army from St. Mary's College, Aboke.

75. Concerning the first objective of his visit, in his discussions with the Government, the Special Representative raised several specific issues concerning the rights, protection and welfare of children affected by the conflict in the Sudan. Those discussions resulted in a number of commitments, as set out in the following paragraphs.

76. *Access to the Nuba mountains.* In a recent discussion with the Secretary-General, the Government of the Sudan promised to allow a United Nations humanitarian assessment mission to travel to areas in the Nuba mountains. The Special Representative raised this matter with the Sudanese Government, which reiterated the commitment made to the Secretary-General, but indicated that the assessment mission should await the completion of an investigation into the recent attack on a United Nations convoy in the area of the Nuba mountains. The Government promised to facilitate the work of the United Nations investigation team.

77. *Recruitment and participation of children in hostilities.* The Government reiterated its commitment, as a matter of policy and law, not to recruit or deploy children under the age of 18 years. The Special Representative urged the Government to ensure that this policy was implemented effectively, including by paramilitary groups aligned with government forces. The Government undertook to correct any deviation from this policy that was brought to its attention.

78. *Use of landmines.* The Special Representative expressed deep concern about the continued use of landmines in the Sudanese conflict. The Sudanese Government, which has signed the Ottawa Convention prohibiting the use of landmines, indicated that it would do everything to avoid deploying landmines. However, it insisted that this was a difficult issue because of the continuing use of landmines by other parties to the conflict and also the fact that several neighbouring countries had not signed the Ottawa Convention. The Special Representative promised to pursue this matter further with all the parties concerned.

79. *Collaboration with the Southern States Coordinating Council.* In his discussion with the Chairman of the Coordinating Council, Riak Machar, the Special Representative emphasized the importance of ensuring the protection, rights and welfare of children in activities under the Council's jurisdiction. Mr. Machar welcomed his proposal to set up a contact group between the Council and relevant United Nations agencies. The contact group would

undertake programmes to build greater awareness within groups under the authority of the Council on humanitarian and human rights standards relating to the protection of children.

80. *Observing the Convention on the Rights of the Child.* The Special Representative urged the Government of the Sudan, which ratified the Convention, to promote the application of its principles and provisions. A national charter based on the Convention, in Arabic and English, was being translated into other, local languages to ensure wider dissemination in the country.

81. During his visit, the Special Representative also learned about the recent humanitarian emergency in the city of Wau in Bahr-al-Ghazal. In the course of the few weeks preceding his visit, an influx of some 80,000 people, predominantly women and young children, had trekked into the city of Wau from SPLA-held areas. It was estimated that this influx was occurring at the rate of a thousand a day. The Special Representative appealed to the international community to reinforce the capacities of the Government and international humanitarian agencies to respond to this situation, especially with the provision of food, medicine and logistical support.

82. The Special Representative was not able to visit the SPLA-controlled areas of the Sudan because of time constraints. However, he met with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement's leadership in Nairobi, where he announced his plans to visit those areas soon.

83. The Special Representative was received in Nairobi by the President of Kenya, Mr. Daniel arap Moi, who was also the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs; he briefed them on his visit to the Sudan. He also met with officials of Operation Lifeline Sudan based in Nairobi.

F. Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Kosovo)

84. The Special Representative paid a three-day visit to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, from 10 to 12 September 1998. Following a one-day stopover for meetings in Belgrade, he spent two days in the province of Kosovo. Throughout the visit, the Special Representative emphasized the humanitarian character of his mandate and his preoccupation with the fate of all children affected by conflict, regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliations or the source of their victimization. The visit had three objectives:

(a) To witness first-hand the humanitarian situation in Kosovo and in particular to assess the impact of the ongoing violence on children;

(b) To witness the situation of Serbian refugee children in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, most of whose families had earlier fled from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from Croatia;

(c) To assess the impact of the ongoing sanctions regime on children in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

85. When the Special Representative made the initial request to visit Kosovo, the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia expressed strong reservations about the proposed visit, taking the position that there was no "armed conflict" in Kosovo – only acts of terrorism perpetrated by Kosovo Albanians, and that in any case this was purely an internal affair of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In the Government's view, therefore, the situation in Kosovo did not fall within the Special Representative's mandate. Following a series of further communications with Belgrade, however, the visit was, in the end, permitted by the Yugoslav authorities.

86. In Belgrade, the Special Representative met with senior government officials, including the Deputy Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Chairman of the Committee for Cooperation with United Nations Peacekeeping Missions and International Forces, the Political Director of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in charge of the United Nations and international organizations, the President of the Commission for Cooperation with UNICEF and for the Advancement of the Position of Women, and the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees; he also met with most of the ambassadors based in Belgrade, including representatives of the Contact Group, the European Community Monitoring Mission and the European Union Troika; the heads of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations; and the representative of ICRC.

87. In Pristina, the Special Representative held discussions with key Kosovo Albanian political leaders, including the Chairman of the Democratic League of Kosovo, Professor Ibrahim Rugova; and the Head of the Kosovo Albanian Negotiation Team, Mr. Fehmi Agani. He also met with Serbian authorities in Pristina, including the Chief of the Kosovo District Administration; the Coordinator of State Bodies, and other officials. He held discussions with the local heads of UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, WHO, ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, with members of the Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission and with international and local non-governmental organizations.

88. During his stay in Kosovo, the Special Representative travelled extensively, mainly in the south-western and central regions of the province, to assess the situation on the ground by visiting affected villages and towns.

89. He spent a day visiting displaced populations who are spread out and stranded in the open along mountain trails in the Banjca-Nekovac and Gashi valleys, and in the Berisha mountains in the Drenica area, to the west of Pristina. He also visited two collective centres for Serbian refugees, located in the vicinity of Pristina.

90. The Special Representative was shocked by what he witnessed in Kosovo. He encountered and visited miles and miles of children and women spread out like a human carpet in the open along mountain trails and in the woods. He saw a population desperately clinging on the edge of sheer survival – without shelter, clean water, medical attention, warm clothing or adequate food and completely exposed to the elements. On several occasions, he encountered old men and elderly women who, in trying to recount their stories, suddenly broke down, weeping uncontrollably in front of their children and grandchildren.

91. It is estimated that some 300,000 people have been displaced by the fighting in Kosovo, more than 60 per cent of whom are children and over 20 per cent women. About 50,000 of the displaced persons are stranded in the open in the mountains and the woods.

92. In order to end the suffering of civilians in Kosovo, particularly children and women, the Special Representative called on the international community and the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to take immediate political action, involving a three-pronged response, as follows:

(a) *Provision of increased humanitarian relief.* Increased resources need to be made available to humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations for the provision of relief supplies to displaced populations, especially the 50,000 children, women and elderly who are now stranded in the open in the mountains and the woods. Their situation will rapidly become untenable with the onset of rains and winter in the coming weeks. In this connection, it is important that the international community respond quickly and generously to the recently launched United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for Humanitarian Assistance. Pressure must be brought to bear on the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Liberation Army to allow unimpeded access for the distribution of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian agencies should also provide assistance to local host families who have taken large numbers of displaced persons into their homes;

(b) *Return of displaced populations.* The most critical need at the present time is the return of displaced populations to their homes. The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia must be made to assume its full responsibility to guarantee security for returnees as well as punish those responsible for committing previous abuse and destruction. Given the present depth of mistrust and fear on the part of Kosovo Albanians, however, there is a need for an increased international humanitarian presence on the ground in Kosovo to serve as a confidence-building measure, to reassure returnees and serve as a deterrent against future abuse by security forces;

(c) *Ceasefire and political negotiations.* The international community must exert greater and concerted political and diplomatic pressure in order to achieve an immediate ceasefire. This is the only way to end the suffering of so many children and women, and to create conditions in which to address the underlying issues in the conflict. Humanitarian response, crucial as it is, must not become a substitute for political action. This is, in part, the lesson of Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

93. In the light of what he witnessed on the ground in Kosovo and the extensive discussions he held with all concerned parties in Belgrade and Pristina, the Special Representative made the following observations and recommendations, corresponding to specific issues:

94. **Impact on neighbouring regions.** It is clear that the violence in Kosovo and the displacement of populations are beginning to have a serious impact on neighbouring regions. Some 40,000 people have fled from Kosovo to Montenegro, 14,000 to Albania and several thousand to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In Montenegro, the number of displaced persons from Kosovo, when combined with refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, represents about 10 per cent of the total population.

95. **Kidnappings and killings by the Kosovo Liberation Army.** There have been several reports of kidnapping and killing of Serbian civilians by the Kosovo Liberation Army. It is estimated that 140 persons, including both Serbians and Albanians, have been abducted by the Kosovo Liberation Army over the past several months. The Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission has also recently reported a mass killing of Christian Albanians and Serbians in the village of Glodjane in the western municipality of Pec. Thus far, the bodies of 39 persons have been recovered, but it is suspected that many more people may have been killed in the Glodjane massacre. The international community must strongly

condemn all atrocities and violence against civilians, regardless of their provenance.

96. **Education for Kosovo Albanians.** One of the most contentious political issues in Kosovo today is the non-participation of Kosovo Albanians in the state educational system at the secondary and university levels. This is due to the ongoing controversy over education policy, curricula etc. As a first step, and in order to open the way for a comprehensive discussion of the problems, the Education Agreement signed in 1996 between President Slobodan Milosevic and Professor Ibrahim Rugova, which provides for ethnic Albanian students and teachers to return to educational premises, should immediately be implemented.

97. **Recruitment and use of children.** Thus far, there is no evidence of the systematic use of children as combatants in the fighting in Kosovo. This contrasts markedly with the situation in many other theatres of conflict today. According to the Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission, they have come across two cases of child combatants serving in the Kosovo Liberation Army, both of whom were about 13 years of age. However, it is possible that there may be the use of children in support roles, such as reconnaissance, or serving as messengers and porters. There should be no complacency on this issue; on the contrary, there is a need for preventive advocacy and vigilance to ensure that the situation in Kosovo does not deteriorate further and that fighting forces do not begin to engage children in hostilities.

98. **Use of landmines.** It is reported by the Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has undertaken systematic deployment of both anti-personnel and anti-tank landmines in the border areas with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In the areas of fighting within Kosovo itself, however, there have so far been only isolated reports of the use of anti-personnel landmines. But here too, there is no reason for complacency. The international community should impress on the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Liberation Army the need to refrain from the use of landmines in Kosovo, which would cause disproportionate and indiscriminate suffering to civilians, especially children.

99. **Assistance for Serbian refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.** There are currently more than half a million Serbian refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, most of whom fled their homes at the height of the armed conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Many of the refugee children and their families feel completely stranded. It is important that the international community does not forget the needs of these refugees, both for humanitarian assistance and for permanent resettlement.

100. **Monitoring the impact of sanctions on children.** As a matter of policy, the Security Council should continue to monitor and seek to mitigate the impact of sanctions on children in all situations. In this connection, the Security Council should review the effect of the ongoing sanctions regime on children in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, particularly with regard to the provision of educational and medical services.

101. **Observing the Convention on the Rights of the Child.** The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The international community should insist that all concerned parties, including non-state actors such as the Kosovo Liberation Army, should fully respect the principles and provisions of the Convention.

VI. Political advocacy

A. Mobilizing concerned Governments

102. The primary responsibility for applying international norms and domestic standards lies with Governments. While international human rights and humanitarian instruments are genuine landmarks and provide a basis for action to protect children victimized by conflict, the gap between these norms and their observance on the ground is unacceptably wide and growing. The primary task of bridging this gap lies with Governments and intergovernmental organizations. The Special Representative, therefore, calls on all Governments to exercise their responsibilities more fully and consistently, to observe local norms and international instruments within their domestic jurisdictions and, at the international level, to apply concerted political and diplomatic pressure on those who systematically violate the rights and welfare of children.

103. The Special Representative has held discussions in capitals and elsewhere with political and government leaders from a number of countries to convey this message and mobilize necessary political support for it. Various Governments have expressed their commitment to make this issue a priority in their diplomatic, development and humanitarian policies.

B. Security Council

104. Since his appointment, the Special Representative has sought to bring the issue of children affected by armed conflict to the attention of the highest political organs of the United Nations. At his request, the Security Council held a public debate on 29 June 1998 on the item "Children and armed conflict". In opening the debate, the Special Representative called upon the Council to consider the plight of children in its deliberations on specific crisis situations, in mandating peacemaking and peacekeeping missions, in the imposition of sanctions regimes, in reviewing standards for the conduct of international personnel and in the design of peace-building programmes. The Special Representative urged the international community to employ its collective influence to ensure the observance, by parties to a conflict, of international norms for the protection of children, and to actively facilitate the achievement of political settlements. Furthermore, the international community can use its weight to deny political legitimacy, diplomatic recognition, the supply of weapons or the flow of funds to those responsible for committing atrocities and abuses against children. The Security Council could take the lead in relaying the clear message that there is no room within the international community for those who systematically commit atrocities and abuses against children.

105. Following the debate, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/1998/18), in which the Council recognized the importance of the mandate of the Special Representative, supported his activities and welcomed his cooperation with all relevant programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations system. The Council expressed its grave concern at the harmful impact of armed conflict on children, strongly condemned the targeting of children in armed conflicts, including their humiliation, brutalization, sexual abuse, abduction and forced displacement, as well as their recruitment and use in hostilities in violation of international law, and called upon all parties concerned to put an end to such activities. The Council supported efforts aimed at obtaining commitments to put to an end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts in violation of international law and to give special consideration to the disarmament and demobilization of child soldiers and to the reintegration into society of children maimed or otherwise traumatized as a result of an armed conflict. It further recognized that, whenever measures were adopted under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, consideration should be given to their impact on the civilian population, bearing in mind the needs of children, in order to consider appropriate humanitarian exemptions.

106. With the debate and adoption of the presidential statement on this issue, the Security Council has recognized that the situation of children affected by armed conflict is a matter of grave and continuing concern for the Council. The Special Representative will seek to work with the Council on an ongoing basis to ensure that attention is given to child protection in any consideration of humanitarian crises and that necessary political action is taken in situations where the rights and welfare of children are violated.

C. Regional activities

107. Promoting the rights and welfare of children in situations of armed conflict is an agenda that should be developed with the active participation of regional and subregional organizations. A regional or subregional arrangement can often provide a more concrete and local framework for the application of the universal norms and international instruments highlighted above. The Special Representative has encouraged the development of appropriate regional and subregional commitments and initiatives towards this end. He has been working to build strong partnerships with several regional and subregional organizations, including the Association of South-East Asian Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the League of Arab States, OAU, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

108. In this regard, the Special Representative has met with the Secretaries-General of OAU, OSCE and OAS and with the Commissioners for Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the European Union in order to present this agenda to them and seek their support. The European Union, in particular, has expressed a strong interest in working closely with the Special Representative to make the issue of children affected by armed conflict an important item on its agenda, as well as to collaborate actively on humanitarian initiatives and post-conflict projects. Similarly, the Secretary-General of OAU has expressed great interest in collaborating with the Special Representative on this agenda.

109. In an effort to broaden the constituency of ownership of the agenda and to initiate concrete commitments by other actors – Governments, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations – the Special Representative has initiated a series of regional symposia on children affected by armed conflict. The first such symposium was hosted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,

as President of the European Union, on 22 and 23 June 1998. The symposium was jointly chaired by the Secretary of State for International Development and the Special Representative.

110. Bringing together senior representatives of European and other Governments, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and regional and academic institutions, the symposium served four important objectives in support of the agenda entrusted to the Special Representative. First, it provided an opportunity for advocacy. Secondly, it generated important political support from participating Governments for the work of the Special Representative. Thirdly, it served as an opportunity for exploring different ideas by experts in areas critical to the agenda, with a view to supporting the Special Representative. Fourthly, the symposium allowed for a further consolidation of partnerships among the Special Representative, Governments and non-governmental organizations in support of a common agenda to protect children's rights in armed conflict situations.

111. As a follow-up to the commitments made at the London symposium, the Special Representative visited Vienna to meet with the Vice-Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria who reiterated the strong commitment of Austria, under its European Union Presidency, to develop further the active engagement of the European Union on this agenda. The Special Representative has urged the European Union to incorporate this agenda prominently into its political, humanitarian and development programmes.

112. The Government of Japan has offered to act as host for a similar symposium, to be held in Tokyo later in 1998 for primarily Asian countries. Plans are also under way to convene similar meetings in other regions of the world.

VII. Partnerships for children

113. To advance the objectives set out in his mandate, the Special Representative is working to broaden the ownership of this agenda and seek the participation and collaboration of key actors from several sectors, official and non-official. To carry out a broad strategy of advocacy and collaborative action, he has started to build partnerships with entities from within and outside the United Nations. Each partner, by virtue of its particular comparative advantage, has a significant role to play in concerted action to promote the rights, protection and welfare of children affected by conflict.

A. Developing a framework for collaboration within the United Nations system

114. The role of the Special Representative is that of a catalyst and advocate, highlighting this agenda and fostering concerted action on it within the United Nations system. The main responsibility for developing operational programmes for promoting the rights, protection and welfare of children rests with the agencies and bodies that have the expertise, resources and presence on the ground. The Special Representative complements the activities of these bodies through public advocacy and appropriate political and humanitarian initiatives.

115. When they do adopt a concerted approach towards a common cause, such as the protection or rehabilitation of children, United Nations agencies and bodies can have a significant impact. In support of the Secretary-General's efforts to streamline United Nations activities both at Headquarters and field levels, the Special Representative has been liaising closely with all relevant United Nations entities in order to develop a common approach on the rights, protection and welfare of children in the context of armed conflict, and to place this issue within the mainstream of United Nations policy-making and programme activities. He has consulted widely with the heads of UNICEF, UNHCR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNDP, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, as well as with senior management committees, in order to develop a framework of institutional and operational collaboration in support of this agenda.

116. The Special Representative is also working through existing executive and consultative mechanisms in order to promote this issue within the mainstream of United Nations activities. His membership in the Senior Management Group chaired by the Secretary-General, the Executive Committee on Peace and Security, the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Group enables him to ensure that the children and armed conflict agenda is internalized in United Nations policy-making and programmatic activities.

117. An informal advisory group in support of the work of the Special Representative composed of representatives of UNICEF, UNHCR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNDP, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, has been established to advise on

programmatic activities, and to coordinate action among these key partners of the Special Representative. The advisory group has proved particularly useful in ensuring the success of the visits of the Special Representative to countries affected by armed conflict.

118. The Special Representative is also a member of the mechanism established by the Department for Disarmament Affairs to coordinate United Nations efforts in controlling the excessive accumulation and proliferation of small arms. Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) is an attempt to address effectively the proliferation of cheap small arms, which are the primary or sole weapons used in numerous intra-state conflicts today, in which up to 90 per cent of the victims are civilians. In these conflicts, children are the victims of small arms fire. Moreover, the proliferation of smaller, lighter arms, and of categories of guns with less and less recoil, has allowed for and induced the recruitment of younger and younger children as gun-bearing soldiers.

B. Engaging civil and non-governmental organizations

119. An important premise of the work of the Special Representative is the need to widen the ownership of this agenda beyond official actors. Civil society organizations, including humanitarian and relief organizations and the human rights community, women's organizations, religious leaders, civic and youth associations, as well as key actors from the private sector, are important partners in the broad movement to protect children's rights and welfare in the context of armed conflict. Non-governmental organizations are particularly important in this regard because of their commitment, expertise and activities on the ground. The Special Representative is encouraging civil society organizations to work to build greater awareness and to mobilize for action on this issue.

120. The Special Representative has now held meetings collectively and individually with the leadership of some 200 international non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations in many countries, mainly drawn from the humanitarian, human rights and development sectors. He has sought their active participation in shaping this agenda and their perspectives on his activities. Several non-governmental organizations from concerned countries have undertaken to develop new programme initiatives and to launch special public awareness campaigns in response to this agenda. Interactions with international and national non-governmental organizations has been a central objective and a crucial source of advice on field missions and other country visits undertaken by the Special Representative. He has also stayed in close contact with groups such as Interaction, the UNICEF NGO Working Group and the Subgroup on Refugee Children and Children in Armed Conflict.

121. In his ongoing discussions with non-governmental organizations, the Special Representative has consistently emphasized several themes, which have been met with a positive response, including, in particular: (a) the necessity for national advocacy programmes to raise public awareness and stimulate governmental action on behalf of children exposed to armed conflict; (b) the urgency of international advocacy campaigns focusing on the rights of children in situations of armed conflict and (c) the importance of organizations with relief, humanitarian and development capacities on the ground to develop more effective and coordinated programmes focusing on the needs of children during and in the aftermath of conflict.

122. The Special Representative endorses and supports the work of several coalitions already established, whose work will directly impact on the protection and well-being of children in situations of armed conflict. One such group is the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, formed to promote the adoption of and adherence to an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, prohibiting the military recruitment and use of any person younger than 18 years. Another coalition is the Leadership Council on Children in Armed Conflict, which advocates action to protect children caught in the brutality of war and support programmes to meet their most urgent needs. Similarly the recently formed International Action Network on Small Arms is committed to mounting a campaign on the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

123. The Special Representative believes that local non-governmental organizations that are active in countries affected by conflict, deserve substantial international, particularly financial, support.

C. The media

124. The central role of the media in forming public opinion and influencing policy is pivotal in building public awareness about the abuse and brutalization of children in the context of armed conflict. The Special Representative has sought to engage and inform the media in his advocacy efforts. He has held a series of briefings in different parts of the world for the international and national media to sensitize them to the abuse and brutalization of children in the context of armed conflict and to inform them about his

activities. This dialogue has led to widening media coverage, both in national media and internationally, of the situation of children victimized by conflict.

D. Outreach to opinion leaders

125. The Special Representative has also made particular efforts to get this message into important circles of opinion leaders, groups and networks, including religious leaders, lawyers, academics, business leaders, women's organizations and other professional associations. He has addressed many major international gatherings of political and opinion leaders in different parts of the world. Furthermore, such efforts are planned in the context of ongoing awareness building and public advocacy.

VIII. Setting up the Office of the Special Representative

126. Since his appointment in September 1997, the Special Representative has worked with a skeleton staff of short-term consultants and one staff member. The staffing process has proved to be exceedingly slow and time-consuming which has greatly hampered the scope and speed of the activities of the Special Representative.

127. The Special Representative has also been active in mobilizing voluntary contributions to support his work. He is grateful for the generous and timely "start-up" contributions of several Governments, UNICEF and UNHCR, which have made it possible for the Special Representative to launch his activities. As the Special Representative expands his activities, and with the prospect of a fully operational staff, further contributions will be critical to his sustained effectiveness. A trust fund has been established at the United Nations Secretariat in New York for receiving voluntary contributions from Governments and other institutions.

IX. Next steps

128. As the Special Representative establishes his priorities for the period ahead, a number of areas for action are emerging, including those discussed below.

A. Country visits and follow-up activities

129. Priority will continue to be given to missions to areas affected by armed conflict to advocate for commitments by conflicting parties to stop the involvement and targeting of children, to assure humanitarian access and to advocate humanitarian ceasefires. Progress in the situation of children in countries already visited will be closely monitored, and a process will be set in place for follow-up activities. In those activities, close cooperation will be developed with concerned Governments, UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, WFP, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, and other partner agencies of the United Nations system, as well as with international and national non-governmental organizations.

B. Advocacy and communication strategy

130. The Special Representative will be working to develop a stronger and more comprehensive advocacy communications strategy, involving, in particular networks of non-governmental organizations and the various media. His outreach efforts during and after field visits and in concerned countries have included interviews and interaction with various print and broadcasting media. This has generated considerable coverage of the plight of children affected by armed conflict. He will seek to build media interest, generate visual materials and develop a media and advocacy kit.

C. Cooperation at the regional level

131. Attention will be given to a range of initiatives at the regional level. These include the organization of regional symposia to raise awareness of the situation of children affected by armed conflict and to mobilize partnerships for children. Following the example of the London symposium, the Special Representative will pursue collaboration with regional bodies to promote regional initiatives and standard-setting for the protection of children in the context of armed conflict. The Secretary-General of OAU and the Special Representative plan to raise this agenda at the OAU Council of Ministers; they are also working to organize a pan-African symposium for this purpose. Finally, the Special Representative will endeavour to bring together countries in subregional groupings in which children face common threats, such as cross-border small arms trade, the use of landmines, child abductions or child recruitment into armed groups. Such neighbourhood initiatives would seek

commitments from States and non-state parties to take concrete collective measures to better protect children in their neighbourhoods.

D. Monitoring post-conflict response

132. The Special Representative has initiated the designation of certain post-conflict situations as pilot cases, where concerted international assistance in support of children's needs could prove particularly effective in the peace-building process. These pilot cases will be studied so as to derive "best practices" and "lessons learned". Certain priority areas of concern are clear, including the social reintegration of child combatants, the resettlement of displaced children or the restitution of basic health services and education facilities for children. Monitoring could begin in Sierra Leone, the first such pilot case to be identified. The results of such monitoring, to be undertaken in collaboration with independent research institutions, will be reviewed and shared with partners to enable them to maximize the impact of their advocacy and action for children both at the country level and internationally.

E. Promoting research on thematic issues

133. The Special Representative will continue to promote collaborative research in selected thematic areas where gaps in knowledge exist and which are of particular potential benefit to children exposed to armed conflict, as well as to organizations and institutions acting on their behalf. One such priority area is sexual abuse and violence, particularly against girls and young women. A second area is the role of local value systems; independent research institutions will be encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of local values favouring child protection and welfare, the status of such values and the ways in which they can be reinforced. The doctrine of *Lapir* among the Acholi of Uganda and the *Sande* and *Poro* schools in rural Liberia are cases in point. A third area that requires further research is the impact of small arms and light weapons on children.

F. Strengthening standards for peacekeeping personnel

134. The Special Representative and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations have held a series of discussions on ways in which standards, procedures and training related to the conduct of peacekeeping personnel can be strengthened. In support of their common commitment to the review and reinforcement of current arrangements, a consultative group has been formed to undertake this exercise and to issue its outcome at the earliest possible date. The Special Representative has sought the perspectives and input of several interested delegations, United Nations agencies and programmes, as well as non-governmental organizations.

G. Development of a database

135. It is recognized that a number of partners have already initiated database development on specific issues relating to the impact of armed conflict on children. There will be no duplication of these efforts. Rather, the Special Representative hopes to draw on existing bases of information to facilitate advocacy activities.

136. Much of the information on children affected by armed conflict at present is diffuse, segmented and not readily accessible. In order to fill these gaps, the Special Representative has approached various research institutions and non-governmental organizations to encourage them to develop databases and other information on children affected by armed conflict; this will also permit key gaps in the present body of knowledge to be identified and filled. Several institutions have responded positively to this invitation. Essex University, for example, has created a new Centre on Children and Armed Conflict; the Centre is currently compiling existing information on all aspects of children affected by armed conflict. Similarly, the Special Representative is drawing on information compiled by Rädda Barnen of Sweden on child soldiers to facilitate his advocacy work.

H. Informal support group for the Special Representative

137. A number of Member States have expressed strong support for the work of the Special Representative. This support has resulted in the formation of an informal support group, a group of "Friends of the Special Representative". It is hoped that this informal group will play an important role by providing ongoing support and advice to the Special Representative in developing his role and activities. The Special Representative plans to constitute a similar support group from the ranks of leading non-governmental organizations.

X. Recommendations

138. The mandate of the Special Representative provides a unique platform for advocacy on behalf of children affected by armed conflict, with a wide range of interlocutors in a variety of domains and networks, including: (a) human rights and humanitarian circles; (b) political, social, economic and cultural groups; (c) civil society organizations; (d) media and communications networks; (e) academics; (f) the international private sector; and (g) financial institutions. The Special Representative can draw public and political attention to the plight of conflict-affected children. He may use humanitarian diplomacy to obtain commitments from belligerents or facilitate humanitarian access, or advocate for preventive and post-conflict recovery measures to assure child rights and protection in these environments. Yet he cannot and will not act in isolation. He works in concert with partners, each of which have specific mandates and capacities that can ensure that commitments to children are fulfilled internationally and on the ground.

139. On the basis of the experience over the past year, the Special Representative is making the following observations and recommendations to generate reflection and discussion, and to serve as a basis for ongoing dialogue with Governments, partners within the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors.

A. Political support for this agenda

140. The Special Representative believes that the most important and pressing challenge today is how to translate existing standards and commitments into action that can make a tangible difference to the fate of children exposed to danger on the ground. Words on paper cannot save the children in peril. It is important that concerned Governments incorporate the protection of children prominently in their foreign policies. And, above all, concerned Governments and other key international actors should be prepared to use their collective weight and influence to deny political legitimacy, diplomatic recognition, the supply of weapons or the flow of funds to those responsible for committing atrocities and abuses against children. In today's interdependent world, no warring party – whether a Government or an insurgency group – can ignore the prospects of such censure and isolation by the wider international community.

B. Security Council

141. The public debate and subsequent statement by the Security Council on the item "Children and armed conflict" was an important and ground-breaking development. The Special Representative urges the Council to remain actively engaged on this issue. And in its future consideration of specific crisis situations, in mandating peacemaking and peacekeeping missions, in the imposition of sanctions regimes, in reviewing standards for the conduct of international personnel, and in the design of peace-building programmes – the rights, protection and welfare of children affected by conflicts will constitute a central and continuing concern.

C. Building partnerships with non-governmental organizations

142. Non-governmental and other civil society organizations have an indispensable role in shaping the agenda for children affected by armed conflict. Their contribution is crucial in many areas. The Special Representative is calling on them to develop activities in three areas in particular: building a movement of advocacy at both the national and international levels; developing operational programmes on the ground to respond better to the needs of victimized children; and to serve as an important source of independent and objective information on particular situations and issues.

D. Initiatives in the midst of conflicts

143. More determined efforts must be employed to prevent or mitigate the suffering of children who are actually caught up in the midst of ongoing conflicts. The following are some of the issues around which the international community should seek to construct concrete initiatives on the ground: access to populations in distress, most of whom are women and children; recruitment and use of children; monitoring and restricting the supply of arms, especially light weapons, to theatres of conflict; and attending more effectively to the needs of displaced populations, the majority of whom are children.

E. Reinforcing initiatives by the Special Representative

144. The capacity of the Special Representative to help ensure the protection and well-being of children in situations of armed conflict will be greatly enhanced by the political support of concerned Governments, both individually and collectively. Where the Special Representative is able to obtain commitments from parties to protect children and civilians, insistence by concerned Governments that such parties honour commitments made is essential. More generally, concrete endorsement and reinforcement by such Governments of initiatives of the Special Representative could greatly enhance the impact of his initiatives on behalf of children.

F. Post-conflict peace-building

145. In post-conflict situations, sustained assistance for reconstruction is required in order to consolidate peace and to support indigenous rehabilitation capacity. A critical component of such assistance must focus on the needs of children, particularly the "crisis of the young". The Special Representative believes that the prospects for recovery in many countries depends very much on recuperating the young and restoring to them a sense of renewed hope. In this connection, the Special Representative calls on key actors responsible for designing post-conflict peace-building programmes, in particular the World Bank, the European Union, UNDP and bilateral development agencies, to make the needs of children a central concern from the outset of their planning. Moreover, post-conflict peace-building must not mean a return to the status quo ante, a return to the conditions that gave rise to the conflict in the first place. In order to prevent the recurrence of conflict and to rebuild lasting peace, we must work systematically to transcend the distorted relationships of yesteryear.

G. Building local capacities for advocacy

146. It is important to build, within countries, independent local capacities for advocacy on behalf of children affected by armed conflict. This is much needed both in the midst of ongoing violence and in the aftermath of war. The Special Representative is promoting two kinds of projects for this purpose: the formation of an informal group of eminent persons to serve as local advocates within a country; and the establishment of local radio stations or programmes – "Voice of Children" – devoted to the needs and interests of children. Such projects, while locally driven, will require strong support from international partners.

H. Raising the age limit for recruitment and participation

147. The Special Representative strongly supports the movement to raise the legal age limit for recruitment and participation of children in hostilities from 15 to 18 years. This is an important component of a broader strategy to eradicate altogether the use of children in armed conflicts. In tandem with this effort, the Special Representative believes that there is an urgent need to organize a more effective campaign of pressure for the observance of existing legal standards in present theatres of conflict.

I. Reviewing the effects of sanctions on children

148. The Special Representative is encouraged by the readiness of the Security Council to consider humanitarian exemptions to measures adopted under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, with a view to ensuring the welfare of children. All efforts should be made to relieve the suffering of children living under sanctions regimes. In this respect, the Special Representative endorses the conclusions of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and in particular supports efforts aimed at addressing the negative impact on infants and children of the sanctions regime against Iraq. He also encourages a review of the impact on children of the sanctions regimes against Burundi and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Such reviews should address in particular the health, educational and nutritional needs of affected children.

J. Promoting local value systems

149. Perhaps the most damaging loss a society can suffer is the collapse of its own local value system. Tragically, especially during periods of protracted conflicts, we are witnessing a breakdown of traditional norms and social codes of behaviour, with horrendous consequences for children in particular, and civilian populations in general. In this context, the Special Representative believes that it is essential to strengthen the various institutions and networks that traditionally inculcate values and that protect children and promote their welfare, such as parents,

extended families, elders, teachers, schools and religious institutions. The mainstay of this effort must be the local community. This community-based process should then be integrated with and reinforced by contemporary norms that have been developed at the international level.

K. From humanitarian response to political action

150. In his various field visits, the Special Representative was struck by the deep and palpable yearning, on the part of the populations, for the end of violence and the restoration of peace. He was equally struck by the increasing frustrations of relief agencies, which often felt they were only able to provide limited "band-aid" solutions.

151. The international community must exert greater and concerted political efforts to address directly the real issues in conflict situations. This is the only way to end the suffering of so many children and women. This humanitarian response, therefore, important as it is in helping to save lives, must not become a substitute for political action.

L. Preventing conflict at the source

152. Armed conflicts have their roots in structural inequities and various practices of exclusion and marginalization. In too many societies today, we are witnessing a phenomenon in which, within a country, there has developed a *centre-and-periphery* relationship, a situation in which there are systematic imbalances in the distribution of development resources and political power between different parts and sectors of the same country. In order to prevent conflicts, which destroy the lives of children, international and national actors alike must take political, economic and social measures that can generate within communities a sense of hope in place of despair, a sense of inclusion and participation instead of exclusion, and a sense of belonging rather than of alienation. Similarly, it is critical to build genuine democratic practice and the rule of law, because in the long run this provides a non-violent and routine way of mediating competing claims within a society.